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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether students in whole language based and basal reader approaches would have different concepts of reading when asked to define reading. Subjects, 69 suburban New Jersey first and third graders and 16 New Zealand first graders, were asked 3 questions: "What is reading?"; "What do you do when you read?"; and "If someone did not know how to read, what would you tell her she needs to learn?" The responses of the first graders were tape-recorded, while the third graders wrote their answers. For each question, responses were placed in one of four categories: vague, educational, decoding, or meaning-centered. Results indicated that whole language students gave less vague responses than did those students in basal reader groups. Results further indicated that although many students saw reading as a catalyst for learning and gave "educational" responses, basal reader students were more apt to view reading as solely a school activity, while whole language students saw reading as an integral part of their lives. Results also showed that although instructional setting accounted for a few differences, young children think of reading mainly as decoding, and do not see it as a meaning-getting, communicative process. (Five tables of data are included, and 49 references are attached.) (Author/PRA)

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First and Third Graders' Concepts of Reading in Different Instructional Settings

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First and Third Graders' Concepts of Reading in Different Instructional Settings

Abigail L. Burns-Paterson

May, 1991

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This study was conducted to determine if, when asked to define reading, students in whole language-based and basal reader approaches would have different concepts of reading. Data were collected from 69 suburban New Jersey students (2 classes of whole language groups, one first grade and one third grade; 2 classes of basal reader groups, one first grade and one third) and 16 New Zealand first graders, all instructed in whole language settings. Students were asked three questions: "What is reading?", "What do you do when you read?", and "If someone did not know how to read, what would you tell her she needs to learn?" The responses of the first graders were tape-recorded while the third graders wrote their answers. For each question, responses were placed in one of four categories; vague, educational, decoding or meaning-centered. It was found that whole language students gave less vague responses than did the students in basal reader groups. Although many students saw reading as a catalyst for learning and gave "educational" responses, basal reader students were more apt to view reading as solely a school activity while whole language students saw reading as an integral part of their lives, saying that they share reading with friends and family. The majority of students from both settings, especially the younger ones, over-emphasized the role of decoding. Except for the whole language third graders, who gave meaning-centered responses to the question on what one does when one reads 67% of the time, most of these students did not understand that reading is a search for meaning and a form of communication between readers and writers. It was concluded that, although instructional setting accounted for a few differences, young children think of reading mainly as decoding and do not see it as a meaning-getting, communicative process. Recommendations for parents, administrators, and teachers are proposed.

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CHAPTER 1

The Problem

The current debate in the teaching of reading concerns how best to improve student literacy. Schools are continually focusing on the definition of reading and the optimal conditions for learning to read (Shannon, 1989). This "Great Debate" (Chall, 1967) seems to have polarized opinions into two definitive philosophies; basal reader proponents and whole language advocates.

The basal reader approach incorporates a series of systematically prescribed texts which typically reflect a phonics approach. This skills-based approach stresses letter/sound correspondence and phonics rules which are taught explicitly. As noted by Weaver (1988) "virtually all basal readers focus at the outset on skills for identifying words rather than on strategies for constructing meaning from the text" (p. 43). In addition, this bottom-up approach teaches comprehension as a set of hierarchical, part-to-whole

skills on a literal level. Advocates of a basal reader approach believe students are breaking a code (Harris & Sipay, 1985), a product-oriented method.

Whole language on the other hand, uses trade books; these meaningful books allow children to read as a "holistic" experience. This method, a top-down approach, encourages children to read in the same natural way they learned to speak. Focus is placed on the process of reading, and meaning is key.

This study focuses on 85 first and third grade children in three different instructional settings: two whole language classrooms in New Jersey, one taught by the researcher, two basal classrooms in New Jersey, and two whole language primary classes in New Zealand.

Whole language teachers believe students in whole language classrooms, have a broader concept of reading. Hence this study sought to determine if, when asked to

define reading, students in whole language based, and basal reader approach classrooms have different concepts of reading.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study addresses is as follows: Do first and third grade children in basal reader based and whole language based reading programs have different concepts of reading?

Specifically:

1. Do first and third graders in whole language classrooms have more meaning-centered concepts of reading?
2. Does instruction influence reading concepts?

Hypothesis

Students in whole language approach classrooms will have more meaning-centered concepts of reading than will their basal reader approach counterparts.

Definitions

In this study, these terms will be defined as follows:

1. Basal Reader Approach: "Teaching of reading through the use of a series of graded reading textbooks; skills, content vocabulary are placed in developmental sequence; teachers materials and children's workbooks usually accompany the basal readers to guide and reinforce learning" (Bush & Andrews, 1980, p. 25).

2. Bottom-up theory: "Assumes that reading begins with print and proceeds systematically from letters to words to phrases to sentences to meaning" (May, 1986, p. 17). It views reading as a part-whole process of translating graphic symbols into speech during oral reading or into inner speech during silent reading. Reading acquisition is believed to require the mastering and integrating of a series of word recognition skills. Instructionally, the accuracy in recognizing words is most important and tantamount to comprehending a selection (May, 1986).

3. Concept of reading: The understanding of the technical terms needed for reasoning about the relationship between written and spoken language (Downing, 1979). Knowledge of reading terms to enhance the understanding of reading instruction.

4. Top-down theory: "Assumes that reading begins with knowledge and hypotheses in the mind of the reader" (May, 1986, p. 17). The reader's prior knowledge and cognitive and linguistic competence play key roles in the construction of meaning. Predictions about meaning are rejected, confirmed, or refined, as the information is processed. It believes students should use meaning and grammatical cues as well as graphic cues to determine unrecognized words. It views reading for meaning as important, students learn to read through meaningful activities in which they read, write, speak, and listen (Harris & Sipay, 1985; May, 1986; Weaver, 1988).

5. Trade books: Books published for general public reading, as opposed to text books (Bush & Andrews, 1980, p. 76).

6. Whole Language: A top-down reading approach which emphasizes the importance of approaching reading and writing by building upon the language and experiences of the student (Goodman, 1986).

Limitations

As with any research which has not been done in a fully controlled environment, this descriptive research has encountered several limitations. Similar to this study,

Freppon (1989) found that early studies of students' reading concepts, "are limited by problems associated with ecological validity" (p. 2). Each of these limitations should be considered when reviewing this study.

Because of the small sample size, the results of this study can only be generalized to similar groups (i.e., children in suburban, New Jersey and suburban, New Zealand).

In addition, although interviews provide more information than other forms of data collection, there is a reduction in the anonymity usually associated with surveys. Subjects are often less willing to offer true answers if they feel the answer could be embarassing or unacceptable to the interviewer. In fact, subjects may not answer interview questions truthfully, rather they will give answers they believe the interviewer is looking for (Kamil, Langer & Shanahan, 1985).

As evidenced in other studies of children's concepts of

reading, (Freppon, 1989; Johns & Ellis, 1976; Reid, 1966) are not easily articulated by young children. Hence a large percentage of vague or irrelevant answers may limit the scope of this study.

A final limitation includes the interview procedure itself. As the researcher was not able to personally interview the New Zealand subjects, the follow-up questions, and the prompting of subjects to clarify answers was up to the discretion of the New Zealand interviewer. However, all interviews were taped and reviewed by the researcher prior to the categorizing of said answers.

Significance

Students' understandings of the fundamental nature and purpose of reading influence their reading behaviors and are an essential element of the process of learning to read (Freppon, 1989; Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1986; Vygotsky, 1962). A considerable body of reading research is rooted in schema

theory. Research on students' reading schemata, for the past twenty years, has shown that a number of variables including socio-economic status, reading achievement, age, and gender often determine children's ideas about the purpose and nature of reading (Canney & Winograd, 1979; Denny & Weintraub, 1966; Downing, 1978; Downing & Ollia, 1975, & Oliver, 1975; Edwards, 1962, Freppon, 1989; Johns & Ellis, 1976).

In addition, researchers have found that instruction may be instrumental in determining children's reading concepts (Barr, 1972, 1974-1975; Cohen, 1974-1975; DeLawter, 1970; Freppon, 1989). Furthermore, many studies took place prior to the inception of "whole language" practice. This study will focus solely on the differences that may be associated with instructional settings. Therefore, comparing responses from students in classrooms using whole language with those using basals, will add to the growing body of available and valuable research information.

The results of this study can serve to define reading from a child's perspective. Additionally, the manner in which educators define reading may be influenced. In turn perhaps the expression of reading will then become more meaning-centered in the design of reading curriculums.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

"Students in various stages of learning to read do their best to make sense of their instruction; however, they may develop perceptions about reading that impede their progress or make the task of reading a somewhat mysterious activity" (Johns, 1984, p. 57).

Teaching children to read is one of the major goals of elementary schools. However little focus has been placed on teaching children what reading really is. In his 1978 study, Harste found that "both teachers and learners hold particular and identifiable theoretical orientations about reading which in turn significantly affect expectations, goals, behavior, and outcomes at all levels" (p. 97).

The major thrust of this chapter is to provide an historical orientation to the origins of research in students' concepts of reading. This investigation will include the earliest studies done in the 50's and 60's, followed by the research of John Downing, through the large scale work done by Johns and Ellis in the 70's to the current

work of Freppon (1989). All of these studies attempted to show the relationship of instructional approach to children's concept of reading. Although there are few current studies, the previous studies remain well respected.

Early Studies on Children's Concepts of Reading

Students' perceptions of reading were first recorded by D. Lewis Edwards, in 1958. Edwards' inquiries sought to determine how 66 disabled readers, grades two to four approached reading. Students were asked what they had thought "good" reading was when they first entered school. These students of average to superior intelligence and physique, had similar replies to each of the following questions; What did you think "good" reading was supposed to mean?; What did you think the teacher meant when she said someone was a "good" reader?; What did you think your parents meant when they said you had done a "good" job reading? (Edwards, 1958).

Each student interviewed had determined reading was a "matter of speed and fluency" (Edwards, 1958, p. 240). Though Edwards did not make a complete analysis of individual responses, consistencies were found. Edwards found that responses to Question 1 were consistent with the same child's response to Questions 2 and 3. In addition, a significant number of students responded with precisely the same answer.

Edwards concluded that the most powerful influence affecting the young learner is the desire for social acceptance by parents, peers and teacher. Edwards explained that it is important for teachers to realize many children are trying to satisfy the requirements for school yet sacrificing a true understanding of reading. "Possibly, if the correct concept of the reading process had been taught more directly and more thoroughly to these children they would have been happier and more productive throughout their

school careers" (Edwards, 1958, p. 241).

G. Glass (1968) found results similar to those of Edwards, following his interviews of poor readers from fourth grade through college. Again readers emphasized speed of reading rather than meaning as "good" reading. This view of reading as suggested by Edwards, may encourage speed at the expense of reading for meaning (Johns, 1984).

In 1963, Denny and Weintraub began individual, taped interviews in five first grade classes. The 111 first graders were from widely divergent socio-economic backgrounds. Groups 1 and 2, which included 38 students, attended a rural school in central Indiana. Groups 3 and 4, were comprised of 27 pupils residing in a large industrial city in Michigan. The fifth and final group contained 22 Black children living in a suburb of Detroit.

Each student was asked to respond to three questions: (a) Do you want to learn how to read?; (b) Why?; (c) What

must you do to learn how to read in first grade? (Denny & Weintraub, 1966). Students' responses were recorded during the first week of school and again at the end of the school year.

Overall no significant differences between boys and girls were found. However, more boys than girls replied with "I don't know" or obedience related responses. Sex-related patterns of responses appeared to be associated with the socio-economic dimensions of the groups.

Similar to the boys in Indiana and Michigan, both male and female Black students in Detroit responded with more obedience related answers. More significantly noted, the Black students gave more goal- oriented answers such as; "It will help me get to second grade."

Finally, Denny & Weintraub reported children who had attended kindergarten were more likely to give meaningful replies than those who had not attended kindergarten.

As a result of their study, Denny and Weintraub (1966) noted that "a fourth of all these entering first-graders could express no logical, meaningful purpose for learning to read and a third of the children had no idea how it was to be accomplished" (p. 447). Denny and Weintraub (1966) emphasized the fact that children need to understand the "reason for a learning situation" (p. 447), and find purpose in a task.

In another report, Denny and Weintraub (1966) analyzed the responses of 108 first graders to the question, "What is reading?" The analysis disclosed that 27% were vague or "I don't know" responses, 33% were object-related (e.g., "when you read a book"), and 20% described reading as a cognitive act (e.g., "helps you learn things"). The remaining 20% of the responses were divided evenly among three categories: (a) value terms - student believed reading was a good thing to do; (b) mechanical descriptions - the student described

reading in terms of decoding; and (c) expectations - student considered reading as something you have to learn to do (Johns, 1986). Denny and Weintraub noted their concern for the 27% of students who were unable to verbalize a response (Denny & Weintraub, 1966).

One of the most frequently cited studies was conducted by Reid (1966). The study had several purposes, one of which was "to explore the general level of concept formation" (Downing, 1971-1972, p. 1) of children in their first year in an infants' class at an Edinburgh city school in Scotland. Twelve children, five years of age were interviewed individually when they had been in school two months, and then twice more, at five and nine months of school. Reid found that when students were given books to read, they were not even clear whether the pictures or letters (marks) were to be read.

Reid concluded that for students, reading is a

"mysterious activity to which they come with only the vaguest of expectancies" (Downing, 1969, p. 219). Reid (1966), as well as Edwards (1958), and Denny and Weintraub (1963, 1966), speculated that if an effort was made to develop an awareness of what reading is, perhaps it would make a difference in students' progress in reading.

Later Studies: Downing and Johns & Ellis

In 1970, Downing replicated and expanded Reid's (1966) study previously discussed in this chapter. Downing's subjects included 13 students: 7 girls and 6 boys, from a school in Hemel Hempstead, England. An experimental method and concrete stimuli (e.g. pictures of someone reading and toy buses with different route numbers) were added to the original study's interview techniques.

Though some of the Hemel Hempstead children were beginning to read their basals, seven children said they could read, two were uncertain, and four said they were

unable to read. However, when posed the question "What is in books?" the Hemel Hempstead children produced answers similar to those of Reid's Edinburgh children. Of the 13 children, only two replied "writing" was in books, and none of the children identified books as having words. The most common response included the names of characters found in either their basal readers or a storybook read at home. Furthermore three children quoted a phrase or sentence found in their basal readers.

Downing's replication of Reid's (1966) study, confirmed Reid's conclusion that young children have only a vague idea of activities actually involved in reading and the real purpose of reading. Like the Edinburgh children in Reid's study (1966), the Hemel Hempstead children were confused by the use of abstract technical reading terms such as word, number, letter, name writing and drawing.

However it must be noted that when presented with

concrete aids, (i.e., the model buses, pictures of cars) and the presentation of an actual book, motor and verbal responses were stimulated. Downing as well as Reid concluded that though the children were unable to verbalize responses, they were developing an understanding of the technical concepts of language.

To date no other study of children's concepts of reading has been as extensive as Jerry Johns' and DiAnn Waskul Ellis' study of 1,655 students from grades one through eight that was reported in 1976. Johns' & Ellis' subjects were selected from several public elementary and middle schools located near a large midwest industrial area. Assumptions were made that the sample was representative of the general expected ranges in intelligence and reading achievement. Athough the majority of the 829 girls and 826 boys were white, there were a few Latino students. The socio-economic status of students ranged from upper middle class to lower

class.

Students were interviewed on an individual basis by graduate and undergraduate students in professional reading courses. Prior to the collection of data, interviewers were trained in the techniques of the interview. In addition, interviewers were instructed in the method of assigning responses to establish consistent data collection.

During the interviews, students were asked three questions; 1) What is reading?, 2) What do you do when you read?, and 3) If someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell him/her that he/she would need to learn? Children's responses were transcribed and classified into logical categories. To check for accuracy of categorization, one-third of the children's responses were reviewed.

Each question was analyzed separately for general trends and differences in sex and grade. In analyzing differences between categories, the chi-square test was

used.

Thirty-six percent of the students were unable to give meaningful responses. However, older students were found to have a somewhat better understanding than their younger counterparts. Though there were few sex differences in the data, boys gave vague or irrelevant responses more often than girls. In addition, girls were more cognizant of the fact that decoding and meaning were essential for reading. Johns & Ellis (1976), concluded that many of the subjects had little or no understanding of the reading process.

The decoding process again appeared along with the most meaningful responses. Johns & Ellis attributed this to teachers' over-emphasizing decoding or sounding-out strategies without including the importance meaning plays in reading.

Finally, Johns & Ellis, concluded that a large number of students had a very restricted view of reading. They

characterized reading as an "activity occurring in the classroom or school environment which utilized a textbook" (Johns & Ellis, 1976, p. 126).

Concept of Reading and Instructional Setting: Current Research

Though investigations of young children have found that understanding of reading improves with grade level or age (Canney & Winograd, 1980; Downing & Oliver, 1973-1974; Filby & Barnett, 1982; Johns & Ellis, 1976; Meyers & Paris, 1978; and Reid, 1966), instructional setting and reading approach also influence students' concepts of reading (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Freppon, 1989).

In their 1986 study, Borko and Eisenhart interviewed 16 second graders with a wide range of abilities in all cognitive areas. Students were selected from four classrooms where observations were also made of classroom reading activities as well as a comparison of teaching strategies. Though all 16 students were interviewed, four

high-group students, each from different classrooms were compared with four low-group students from different classrooms. Interviews were conducted during the beginning, middle and end of the school year.

Distinct patterns were found among responses of each group. High-group students' responses emphasized reading skills, followed by holistic reading and then by appropriate behavior. Their low-group counterparts on the other hand emphasized appropriate behavior, followed by reading skills and then holistic reading.

The differences between high and low-group responses were attributed to the reading experiences provided these students in their classrooms. The focus of attention during a low-group activity was placed on decoding skills. Students were specifically asked to give rules pertaining to decoding.

In contrast, high-group students were observed more

often extracting meaning from text, and they were allowed to work on skills independently. In addition, high-group readers were given more opportunities to read. Included in the high-group readings were larger segments of text which could be read silently.

Borko and Eisenhart therefore concluded the reasons for student failure in learning to read are inherent in reading programs. Students in high-ability groups will improve their reading ability because they are actually reading. Whereas low-ability readers cannot improve if they are not given opportunities to read.

Meyers and Paris (1981) suggest that children's understandings of the skills, purposes, and dimensions of reading may influence how they learn to read. In support of this assumption Filby and Barnett (1982) examined second and fifth grade students' perceptions of which of their classmates were "better readers" and their criteria for

selecting these students. Children emphasized oral reading performance and reading group membership, however performance on reading tasks and the meaning derived from reading were ignored.

Hence, Filby and Barnett concluded, students' conceptions appeared to be related to the nature of the reading program. Children are well aware of ability grouping and see accuracy and fluency in oral reading performance as the purpose of reading.

Since the Johns and Ellis study (1976) very few researchers have focused on children's concepts of reading. However in 1988, Timothy Rasinski and Diane DeFord examined first graders' concepts of reading in three instructional settings; mastery learning, traditional, and literature-based. Different approaches to the teaching of reading and writing were observed and student interviews were conducted.

Each student was asked a series of three questions about

reading and writing; (a) What is reading?; (b) What is writing?; and (c) What do you do when you read and write? Student responses were rated on a seven-point scale; one being a decoding response (e.g., When you write you spell things out) and seven an holistic response (e.g., I write a lot of stuff to my friends like letters to my mom, happy birthday cards).

The mastery class was observed as having a very strict routine including seatwork and reading groups tracked by ability. The students in this classroom were well aware of the routine and worked in an orderly fashion in their seats.

The data gathered from the mastery learning class were reflective of the approach Rasinski and DeFord (1988) observed in the classroom. The mastery learning students gave very analytical responses to the questions posed. The average score on the seven-point scale for the mastery learning class was 3.68 for reading and 3.88 for writing.

This was the lowest average of the three groups included in the study. Clearly the responses from the students in this group were influenced by the strong skill-based, mastery approach in which they participated.

The second class observed was traditional in approach. The daily routine was organized around the content areas and all large and small group lessons were teacher-directed. The reading program included a basal series with supplementary materials (i.e., workbooks) and some literature read to the students by the teacher.

The concepts of reading and writing held by the traditional class students fell between the mastery and literature-based students on the seven-point scale. An average score for the traditional class in reading was 3.91 and 4.97 in writing. Rasinski and DeFord did not see the results in the traditional class as surprising, for they remained consistent with the literacy curriculum found in the

room.

The third group, a literature-based group, unlike the mastery and traditional classes, moved freely about the classroom. Children chose work areas and materials unless the teacher directed them to specific tasks. Thematic units incorporating all the aspects of the traditional curriculum were achieved through sharing and independent work. Reading lessons were conducted in individual and small group situations and occurred throughout the day.

The most meaning oriented conceptions of reading (4.94) and writing (5.37) were revealed in the literature-based group. Students in this group were less concerned with the form of writing and viewed reading and writing as meaningful activities. Again, Rasinski and DeFord found a relation between the children's concepts of reading and writing and the literacy curriculum evidenced in their instructional setting.

Overall, Rasinski and DeFord found there is a congruence between the instructional settings in which these children participated and their concepts of reading. Furthermore, Rasinski and DeFord believe that children will take the concepts of literacy experienced in school into future literacy experiences. Each researcher believes that the goal of education is to prepare children for more "socialized reading" in which they will participate in society. It is the fear of Rasinski and DeFord that "if children are presented with meaningless skills for decoding they will miss the more global, lifelong purpose of reading; gaining meaning for functional purposes" (1988, p.60).

In 1989, Penny Freppon also conducted an extensive study that not only included student interviews, but also several selections of incomprehensible print referred to as "altered passages," running record analysis, and observations.

To begin, Freppon set out to answer two questions of her

own: (a) Do children from literature-based and skill-based instructional settings differ in their concepts of reading?; (b) If the children do differ in their concepts of reading to what extent and in what ways do they differ?

Included in the study were twenty-four white first grade children who were average readers. Six students (three girls and three boys) were randomly selected from a group of average readers in each of four classrooms; two literature-based and two skill-based. Average reading abilities were determined by the 1982 Stanford Achievement Test, teacher recommendation, and school records.

Because Freppon believed it is difficult for first-graders to verbalize responses, two closed questions were added to the original four; (a) What's more important when you read, getting all the words right or understanding the story? and (b) Is reading thinking about the story in your mind or saying all the words right?

Altered passages consisted of several passages: one was intact and made sense, three were altered in various ways to make them incomprehensible. Passages were used to gain insight into students concepts of reading. The presumption was made that students who believed reading is a meaning based process would reject print which did not make sense.

Running Record procedures (Clay, 1979) were used while students read two unfamiliar stories from the Holt Reinhart & Winston, 1983, basal series. A profile of each reader was provided through the use of the Running Record. The profile yielded information on the strategies and cueing systems students used when reading.

Classroom observations were recorded on audio-cassette and an analysis of reading instruction was made in several ways. Data on students' responses and specific teaching strategies included the following: (a) oral and silent

reading and level of discussions (b) assignment of workbook pages and worksheets and skill and literature response activities (c) round robin oral reading, partner or choral reading, and teaching strategies such as voice print matching, prediction and word accuracy.

This researcher will focus on Freppon's findings of the interview techniques and their implications when considering this study. Freppon found the responses to both the open-ended and closed questions yielded mixed results. Responses to open-ended questions resulted in students' describing graphophonic relationships and learning and knowing words. In addition, Freppon found that the literature-based group included other strategies when they described trying to figure out a word such as skipping words and using context clues.

According to Freppon, the most obvious difference in interview responses was discovered in the students'

metacognitive understandings. Literature-based students exhibited a keen knowledge of various reading strategies. They emphasized the similarity of oral language and reading, and were able to express an awareness of print in not only books but within the environment. Over 50% of the literature-based students named more than one item which could be used if they didn't have a book. However, their skill-based counterparts were not able to do the same. Less than 10% of the skill-based students named more than one item which could be read.

In response to the closed questions designed to reveal students' views of the nature and purpose of reading, a variety of patterns were disclosed. In the literature group, 92% of the students chose understanding the story or both understanding the story and getting the words right as most important when reading. However only 56% of the skill group suggested the same response. Finally 83% of the

literature- based group selected reading as thinking about the story or thinking about the story and saying all the words right when given a choice between the two answers, as opposed to 33% of the skill-based group.

In conclusion, Freppon hypothesized that instruction does influence literacy learning. Furthermore, Freppon, as well as each researcher discussed within this chapter, found that additional attention must be directed toward students' understanding of reading, which may in turn enhance their reading success.

Conclusion

The studies which have been reviewed in this chapter may help us to understand how children are developing a concept about this abstract act we call reading. However, despite the number of previous studies, there is still no consensus of opinion regarding the best method of teaching reading. We still need to continue extensive research in

this field. Especially needed is research that studies the connection between the concepts of reading students hold and instructional settings.

CHAPTER 3

Methods and Procedures

Throughout the literature it is evident that not all children have a meaningful concept, if any concept at all, of reading. This researcher hypothesized that many children will develop more meaningful concepts of reading when taught through more meaning and child-centered reading programs such as whole-language. To achieve supporting data for this hypothesis, the goal of this study was to determine concepts of reading held by first graders in different instructional settings.

To fully understand the nature of this study one must discern the differences between basal and whole language instructional settings.

Basal classrooms are most often instructed by teachers who believe reading is best achieved through the learning of letter/sound correspondences so that students can sound out or decode words. Most advocates of a phonics approach such

as this, believe that learning to read means learning to pronounce and identify words correctly and then gain their meaning (Weaver, 1988).

Basal programs present a carefully controlled vocabulary. At the early stages, a small number of words are introduced, and then are repeated for reinforcement. As the levels go up, the number of additional new words is slowly increased, and the repetitions are slowly decreased.

The preplanned, sequentially organized, materials teach developmental reading skills systematically. A variety of these materials, designed by publishers, are available to the basal teacher. Each series includes students textbooks, consumable workbooks, and teacher's editions. Other accessory materials may include story cards or charts, filmstrips and audio-cassettes, over-sized cards for group practice with phonics elements, words and phrases, posters, supplementary paperback storybooks, and worksheets for

reinforcement.

As noted by Harris and Sipay (1985), the trend in enrichment is to provide a variety of materials in convenient packages as optional supplements. Though the materials and instructional procedures have been created and produced by a publisher, it is up to the teacher to d cide which materials best fit the needs of the students.

Whole language however, is a philosophy, as opposed to basal programs, which are carefully graded, sequential materials to be used according to the prescriptions written in the Teacher's Manual.

A whole-language classroom teacher also choses the materials which best fit the needs of the students. However, whole- language classrooms are child-centered in which children are decision-makers as well as teachers.

Educators are beginning to understand that children who learn to read at home, or in whole language classrooms

typically learn to read in much the same way as they learned to speak (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Weaver; 1987). In whole language classrooms, readers draw on their prior knowledge, including life experiences and their language base, to generate hypotheses regarding the meaning of the printed material. Hypotheses, or predictions, are based on the use of several cue systems: graphophonemic, semantics, background knowledge, and syntax, the manner in which the word is used grammatically.

Additionally, whole language sees every facet of the curriculum as interrelated. Students use reading, writing and oral language throughout the content areas. Reading is therefore seen as a purposeful task in which the reader is an active participant, and "meaning" is key.

As discussed in Weaver (1988), there are an increasing number of commercially available materials which aid whole

language teaching. Most common are the Big Books, originally from New Zealand. Big Books are books printed in large enough type that they may be seen by a group of children, often read as a class together, guided by the teacher. Thus creating a relaxed supportive reading atmosphere.

Setting

Data for this study were collected from first and third grade children in three different types of instructional settings: two whole language classrooms in River Edge, New Jersey, two basal classrooms also located in River Edge, and two whole language primary classes in Remuera, Auckland, New Zealand. However, the New Zealand classes will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5 as one group.

The teaching backgrounds of the teachers responsible for the students included in this study are varied. As can be seen in Table 1, all teachers have at least a bachelor's degree and have been teaching their grade level for three

years, and four have completed a master's program.

It must be noted that a master's program in New Zealand is referred to as a Higher Diploma of Teaching.

Table 1

Number of Years Teaching and Level of Education of First and Third Grade Teachers

	Degree held	
Number of years Teaching	Bachelor's	Master's
0 - 5	1	1
6 - 10	0	1
11 - 15	0	0
16 - 20	1	2
TOTAL	2	4

River Edge, New Jersey is a small suburban town in Northern New Jersey. River Edge maintains a population base of approximately 10,000-11,000 residents and is a middle to upper-middle class community.

The school district of River Edge includes two elementary schools and regionalized junior and senior high schools with the bordering town of Oradell. Both elementary schools include grades K-6, each with approximately 350 students. The district is administered by a superintendent, individual school principals and a coordinator of staff development. Classes are self-contained, with the classroom teacher responsible for the basic program.

Though the four River Edge teachers included in this study share administrative support, each has a distinct philosophy concerning the teaching of reading. Two are advocates of a basal reader approach, and the other two, one the researcher, believe in a whole language philosophy.

Data from New Zealand subjects were gathered in two schools each located in Remuera, Auckland. Remuera is a suburb of Auckland City which includes a population of one million and is a mostly middle to upper-middle class

suburb.

Female students included in the New Zealand group attend Victoria Avenue School, one of three public primary schools in Remuera. The school is comprised of approximately 350 female and male students, ages 5-10 years. The majority of the students enrolled in the Victoria Avenue School are from a European background, however the school population also includes a few Asian and Pacific Island children (B. Upkar & J. Bennnett, personal communication, April 12, 1991).

Like all teachers in New Zealand, the teacher of the Victoria Avenue students, B. Upkar, teaches reading with a whole language philosophy. Her goals are to teach reading for pleasure, enjoyment, and most of all meaning. In Ms. Upkar's program a broad spectrum of reading materials are presented through Shared Book Experience (Holdaway, 1979), poetry, Language Experience Approach (Ashton-Warner, 1963), and guided instructional reading (B. Upkar, personal

communication, April 12, 1991).

The male subjects sampled, though also residents of Remuera, attend the Saint Kentigern School, a private Presbyterian school. Saint Kentigern School enrolls 500 boys, ages 5-12 years. This student population is 95% European with the remainder being a balance of Asian and New Zealand Maori students. Saint Kentigern students come from mostly affluent homes and are both economically and culturally advantaged (N. Allwood, personal communication, April 12, 1991).

Ngaire Allwood, the teacher of the boys at the St. Kentigern School, also believes in a whole language philosophy. Through trade books, poetry, songs, big books, and dramatization, Ms. Allwood promotes reading in an enjoyable, challenging, and thought-provoking manner. Ms. Allwood believes reading should be literary based, and a meaningful part of communication, and interrelated with other

language arts, such as writing, listening, and speaking (N. Allwood, personal communication, April 12, 1991).

Subjects

The American sample included 69 subjects from four classrooms located in different elementary schools within River Edge. Each class was heterogeneously grouped. The students ranged in ability from gifted/talented to those students needing basic skills. Classroom, Basic Skills and Resource Room placement was determined by scores achieved on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills gathered in the preceding grade and by teacher recommendation. In addition, three third grade students attend a Resource Room for remediation in several academic areas.

The basal reader (BR) classes, included 18 first grade and 17 third grade children. The whole language (WL) classes consisted of 16 first grade and 18 third grade students. (See Table 2 for distribution of sample.)

The New Zealand sample included 8 girls from the Victoria Avenue School and 8 boys from the Saint Kentigern School. Upon their fifth birthday, children enter the New Zealand schools, hence each student has been attending school for a varying length of time.

Students of all ability levels are included in a New Zealand classroom; the remediation of all students is the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Classrooms include students who might be placed in a special education program if they attended an American school.

Students in New Zealand are not graded on a pass fail basis, and proceed through their school years by age not level of achievement. Hence standardized testing is non-existent.

Table 2

Distribution of Sample

Instructional Setting	Number of Students		
	Boys	Girls	Total
American Basal Reader (1BR) First Grade	9	9	18
American Whole Language (1WL) First Grade	8	8	16
New Zealand (1NZ) Six Year Olds	8	8	16
American Basal Reader (3BR) Third Grade	5	12	17
American Whole Language (3WL)	12	6	18
TOTAL	42	43	85

Instruments

The same individual interview format used by Johns & Ellis (1976) was employed to elicit first graders responses. Three open-ended questions were posed to students individually: (a) What is reading?; (b) What do you do when you read?; and (c) If someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell him/her that he/she would need to learn? Student responses were recorded on audio-cassette and finally tallied on a coding sheet, using the categories similar to those developed by Johns and Ellis (1976).

The same three open-ended questions were given to the third grade in a whole class situation. Students were asked to write their unprompted responses. Similarly the third grade data were recorded on a tally sheet, and categorized.

To establish reliability, the responses to the interview questions and tally sheet were reviewed by two other teachers completing a Master's in Reading program at William Paterson College of New Jersey. During the final

coding stage, teacher's suggestions for changes were considered and additions and deletions were made.

Procedures

To gather data, first grade subjects were individually interviewed and taped on audio-cassette, whereas the third graders were simply given the three questions and responded through writing. River Edge students were interviewed by the researcher while New Zealand interviews were conducted by New Zealand teachers Janine Bennett and Ngaire Allwood. All interviews were conducted in the morning to avoid limitations caused by fatigue.

First grade students were called individually from the classroom to meet with the interviewer in an established quiet area, outside of the classroom setting. Interviewers began by trying to establish an informal rapport with the first grader by asking general information questions such as: (a) What is your name?; (b) How old are you?; (c) Do you

enjoy reading?/Why?

Following the preliminary questions, first graders were asked the three open-ended questions about reading (i.e., What is reading?; What do you do when you read?; If someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell her that she would need to learn?). In an effort to control for continuity in responses, the third question was asked using "her and she" which differs from question three in the Johns & Ellis (1976) study, which included "him/her and he/she."

Subsequent to the collection of data, student interview and written responses were reviewed by the researcher, and each was placed in one of four categories similar to those used by Johns and Ellis (1976). These categories, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, are as follows:

Category 1: no response, vague, circular, or irrelevant such as; "I don't know."

Category 2: responses that described the classroom procedures involved in reading or the educational value of reading, e.g., "It helps you learn new things."

Category 3: responses that characterized reading as decoding or involving word-recognition procedures, e.g., "It's when you sound out a word."

Category 4: responses that defined reading as understanding or both decoding and understanding.

To assure accuracy of tallied answers, two elementary teachers working on a masters degree in reading, examined each response which resulted in a 96% interrater agreement. The data were reported in descriptive tables.

Summary

In brief, this study proposed to draw conclusions about children's concepts of reading when these children are in three different instructional settings, including four in New Jersey schools and two in New Zealand schools. Data were collected by this researcher and experienced teachers in New Zealand. Final results will be reported and discussed in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Data collected in this study were used to support the hypothesis that children will develop more meaningful concepts of reading when taught through meaning and child- centered reading programs such as those termed whole language than when taught through more skill-based reading programs. Specifically, this study sought to determine concepts about reading of first and third graders, and to see if their concepts have been influenced by their instructional settings.

This study focused on 85 first and third grade children in three different instructional settings: two whole language classrooms in New Jersey, one taught by the researcher, two basal classrooms in New Jersey, and two whole language primary classes in New Zealand. It must be noted that the New Zealand students will be discussed as one group

during chapters 4 and 5.

New Jersey basal classes, one first grade and one third grade, were highly structured, sequentially organized programs. Whole language, New Jersey classes, one first grade and one third grade, were taught by teachers who believe meaning is key in the teaching of reading, and use only trade books in their programs. The two New Zealand teachers were also using trade books and believe in a whole language philosophy.

The same three open-ended questions about reading, used by Johns and Ellis (1976) were posed to first and third graders in a variety of instructional settings. First grade responses were recorded on audio-cassette, transposed, and tallied. Third graders wrote their unprompted responses which were also tallied. Responses were tallied and placed in categories similar to those developed by Johns and Ellis.

The three questions which formed the basis of the

investigation will serve as subheads for discussing the responses of the various subgroups. Responses for each question were examined for differences in instructional setting, sex, and grade. Tables and discussion will be used to make comparisons among students' responses.

Results for Question 1: What is Reading?

The responses for this question were summarized in Table 3 and organized into four categories as follows:

Category 1: no response, vague, circular, or irrelevant such as; "I don't know." or "It's fun."

Category 2: responses that described classroom procedures, involved in reading, reading materials, or the educational value of reading, e.g., "It helps you learn new things." or "When you read a book."

Category 3: responses that characterized reading as decoding or involving word recognition procedures, e.g., "It's when you sound out a word."

Category 4: responses that defined reading as understanding, communicating, or referred to both decoding and understanding, e.g., "Talking about a story." or "Talking about a story by reading words."

When posed the question, "What is reading?" a New Zealand first grader confessed "I don't know, that's a hard question." This is well evidenced by the 20% of all the students' responses which qualified for category 1. These

students have an apparent lack of understanding of what reading is. This is especially evident in the 41% and 22% of the Basal Reader groups (3BR & 1BR respectively) who gave vague answers, while only 12% of all the Whole Language students appeared to be vague.

Several researchers have found that understanding of reading improves with grade level or age (Canney & Winograd, 1980; Downing & Oliver, 1973-1974; Filby & Barnett, 1982; Freppon, 1989; Johns & Ellis, 1976; Meyers & Paris, 1978; and Reid, 1966). This significant number of vague responses by the Basal Reader groups may be attributed to immaturity or to the stress on skills in Basal Reader programs that obscures reasons to read.

The highest percentage of responses fell in category 2, (38%). Except for 1NZ (31%), the responses of Whole Language students were the highest in this group, (44% for 1WL and 50% for 3WL), with an across-the-board response that "Reading is

a way to learn new things." Though these students did not seem to see reading as a way of directly deriving meaning, they did understand that information could be gleaned from books which would help them learn new ideas or succeed in school.

Edwards (1958), explains that teachers must realize that young learners have a strong desire for social acceptance by parents, peers and teachers. Edwards noted that teachers must realize while children are trying to succeed by meeting what they believe to be the school requirements, they are often sacrificing a true understanding of reading.

Twenty-nine percent of the students defined reading as, "A way of sounding words out." These category 3 responses which focus on decoding, were the second most often given responses to define reading; "saying the words" or "when you look at the letters."

The substantial number of students in this study

focusing on a decoding response, despite classroom orientation, coincides with Biemiller's (1970) research, which showed that first-graders progress through three stages of reading. Initially students attend to meaning or contextual information from the text, then to graphophonic features of print, and finally there is an integration of both decoding and meaning.

This notion of becoming "glued" to the text, may be corroborated in the research of Calkins, 1986; Chall, 1983; Freppon, 1989; Mason, 1977; McGee and Richgels, 1990. Each of these researchers have found that during certain developmental stages of learning to read, students may attend to single aspects of print such as graphophonic relationships despite instructional environment.

The smallest percentage (13%) of responses to Question 1, were meaning centered with Basal Reader and Whole Language groups coming out similarly. Again, despite

orientation, few of these young children believed reading was communicating or understanding.

In summary, Whole Language groups gave less vague (12% versus 32%) and more educational (42% versus 31%) responses while both groups overall produced low percentages of meaning-centered responses. From one-quarter to one-third of both groups gave "glued to the text" responses that seem to be typical. This again supports the literature of McGee and Richgels (1990), and Calkins (1986) that at certain developmental points children become very aware of phonics rules and actually see decoding as the most important element in reading.

Slight differences were evidenced between boys and girls. Though not delineated in Table 3, girls gave more vague (11 out of 17), but also more meaning-centered (6 out of 11) answers than boys. Whereas boys gave more decoding responses than girls (15 and 10 respectively).

This study found first grade students gave more meaningful responses than their third grade counterparts to Question 1. With first graders giving meaningful responses from 13% to 17% of the time, as compared with the third graders 11% and 12%, a contrast is found between this study and the work of Johns and Ellis (1976). Johns and Ellis found that older students had a somewhat better understanding of the reading process, than the younger students interviewed. This result may be characteristic of the differing procedures in obtaining the students' responses. First graders may have been willing to give more lengthy responses orally, whereas the third graders were asked to respond in a written format which possibly inhibited them from giving a lengthy reply. (See Table 3 for distribution of responses.)

Table 3

Question 1: What is Reading?

		Categories			
Group	(N)	1 Vague	2 Educational	3 Decoding	4 Understand
1BR	18	22%	39%	22%	17%
1WL	16	12%	44%	31%	13%
1NZ	16	12%	31%	44%	13%
3BR	17	41%	24%	23%	12%
3WL	18	11%	50%	28%	11%
TOTAL	85	20%	38%	29%	13%
BR TOTAL	35	32%	31%	23%	14%
WL TOTAL	50	12%	42%	34%	12%

Results for Question 2: What do you do when you read?

The responses for this question were summarized in Table 4 and organized into four categories as follows:

Category 1: no reponse, vague, circular, or irrelevant, e.g., "I don't know." or "I sit with my mom and dad."

Category 2: responses that described classroom procedures involved in reading, reading materials or the educational value of reading, e.g., "I read in reading group."

Category 3: responses that characterized reading as decoding or involving word recognition procedures, e.g., "I sound out the words."

Category 4: responses that defined reading as understanding, communicating or responses that referred to both decoding and understanding, e.g., "I tell what the writer is telling you." or "I take clues and think about what the words are."

With only 8% of the total responses classified as "vague," the apparent lack of understanding of reading reflected in responses to Question 1 was not evidenced as much in Question 2. (See Table 4 for distribution of responses.) The Basal Reader students gave more "educational" responses this time (29% versus 8%). It must be noted however, of the 14 students that gave "educational" responses 10 students responded that they share books with teachers, friends, and, most frequently, parents. Though

these answers were not the most meaningful answers given, clearly these students see reading as a form of sharing and socializing. Rasinski and DeFord (1988), see this "socializing through reading" as an important step toward promoting whole language programs to meet the larger goal of education which they believe to be preparing children to read outside of school for functional purposes.

However, 42% of all the students' responses to Question 2, were classified as category 3 or decoding responses. Contrary to what was hypothesized, 22 of the 36 responses were from students in Whole Language classes, though the differences of 44% (WL) and 40% (BR) were not significant.

As a group, the Whole Language students gave meaningful responses 42% of the time while Basal Reader students gave meaning-centered responses only 20% of the time. Third grade Whole Language students (3WL) gave meaningful responses 67%

of the time. It appears that by the third grade, Whole Language students really see reading as a search for meaning.

Similar to the findings from Question 1, a slightly larger percentage of girls gave vague or irrelevant responses whereas the boys were more focused on decoding. This again contrasts with the findings of Johns and Ellis (1976) that boys gave more irrelevant or vague answers, whereas girls were more cognizant of the fact that both decoding and meaning were essential for reading. However almost equal numbers of boys (13) and girls (15) perceived reading as understanding or understanding and decoding.

Table 4

Question 2: What do you do when you read?

		Categories			
Group	(N)	1 Vague	2 Education	3 Decoding	4 Understand
1BR	18	11%	50%	28%	11%
1WL	16	19%	6%	50%	25%
1NZ	16	0%	19%	50%	31%
3BR	17	12%	6%	53%	29%
3WL	18	0%	0%	33%	67%
TOTAL	85	8%	17%	42%	33%
BR TOTAL	35	11%	29%	40%	20%
WL TOTAL	50	6%	8%	44%	42%

Results for Question 3: If someone did not know how to read, what would you tell her that she would need to learn?

The responses for this question were summarized in Table 5 and organized into four categories as follows:

Category 1: no response, vague, circular, or irrelevant, e.g., "They need to learn English." or "How to read."

Category 2: responses that described classroom procedures involved in reading, reading materials or the educational value of reading, e.g., "They could go to a reading school."

Category 3: responses that characterized reading as decoding or involving word recognition procedures, e.g., "A, E, I, O, U." or "How to sound out the words."

Category 4: responses that related reading as understanding, communicating, or responses that referred to both decoding and understanding, e.g., "They have to learn to listen and try to think." or "Sounding out the words and understanding them."

As is evidenced in Table 5, 76% of all the students believed that someone needs to decode to learn to read. Most astoundingly, 82% of the Whole Language students gave decoding responses while 69% of the Basal Reader students named decoding as most important. Although Whole Language teaching purports to place less emphasis on phonics, the students themselves appear to believe that decoding is the

most important thing to learn in order to read. This perhaps may be attributed to the large percentage of the children participating in this study that read with their parents. Though they are providing an enriching activity for their child, many parents believe that to learn to read a child must sound out the letters and they may be strongly reinforcing that notion at home.

Only three students (4% of the total), all first graders from each instructional setting, acknowledged understanding and meaning as important elements in learning to read. Unfortunately these results are similar to those of Johns and Ellis (1976) who found that many of the children had little or no understanding of the reading process. Johns and Ellis found that 36% of the 1,655 students they interviewed were unable to give meaningful responses.

On the other hand, Freppon (1989) found that 92% of the students she interviewed from the literature-based class,

chose understanding the story and getting the words right as most important when reading. However, only 56% of the skill group suggested the same response. Perhaps if given a choice of answers, the students in this study would have been able to give more conclusive responses.

Though the largest percentage of students (76%) gave decoding answers to Question 3, vague or irrelevant answers accounted for the second most frequent responses (12%). In fact, the Basal Reader group had twice as many vague responses as their Whole Language counterparts (17% and 8% respectively). In addition, the Whole Language students (4%) had twice as many meaning-centered responses than the Basal Reader group (2%). This result seems to suggest that instructional setting does have some influence in determining reading concepts.

The conclusion that instructional setting influences students' reading concepts is further supported by the

findings of Rasinski and DeFord (1988). In their 1988 study, Rasinski and DeFord found that students in a literature-based or whole language program viewed reading and writing as meaningful activities as opposed to students in mastery or basal classrooms.

Table 5

Question 3: If someone did not know how to read, what would you tell her, that she would need to learn?

		Categories			
Group	(N)	1 Vague	2 Education	3 Decoding	4 Understand
1BR	18	17%	17%	61%	5%
1WL	16	6%	13%	75%	6%
1NZ	16	0%	6%	88%	6%
3BR	17	18%	6%	76%	0%
3WL	18	17%	0%	83%	0%
TOTAL	85	12%	8%	76%	4%
BR TOTAL	35	17%	11%	70%	2%
WL TOTAL	50	8%	6%	82%	4%

Discussion

Though the hypothesis of this study was not upheld completely, several major conclusions important to the support of whole language programs and the understanding of children's concepts of reading were revealed. Students in whole language classrooms may not have all meaning-centered responses, yet they are responding with other well thought out answers. Basal readers on the other hand, overall gave twice as many vague or irrelevant answers.

This study further concluded that even though New Zealand and American Whole Language teachers are giving their students more global experiences in literature, students are still reflecting very skills-based approaches in their definitions of reading.

Furthermore, though a large percentage of whole language students answered Question 2, "What do you do when you read?" with a response which was placed in category 2, many of these

children gave answers which included a sharing activity with their parents whereas basal readers more often viewed reading as a school activity.

Though the whole language students' category 2 responses to Question 2 were not classified as meaningful, according to the categories developed for this study, I don't believe we can diminish the importance of this activity. As previously discussed, the interaction of children with their parents and peers in a "socialized reading" (Rasinski & DeFord, 1988), may better prepare these students in becoming lifelong readers, which is the crux of the whole language philosophy.

As supported by several other studies including Johns and Ellis (1976), overall most children find it very difficult to articulate their answers (Canney & Winograd, 1980; Downing & Oliver, 1973-1974; Filby & Barnett, 1982; Meyers & Paris, 1981, and Reid, 1966). This was best evidenced in the response by a student in the American Whole

Language first grade, to Question 1, when he replied, "I know what it is, but I don't know the words for it."

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Data were collected through the use of individual interview techniques and written responses to determine the influence of instructional setting on first and third graders' concepts of reading. The study provided descriptive information in response to the hypothesis; students in whole language approach classrooms will have more meaning-centered concepts of reading than will their basal reader approach counterparts.

Conclusions

Based upon the findings related to the data and an analysis of similar research, the following may be concluded:

1. A large percentage of first and third graders have a very vague understanding of the process of reading especially those in a basal reader setting. This may be attributed to immaturity and inability to articulate their answers or to the stress on skills that obscures purposes for reading in basal classrooms.

2. Most students, specifically younger students, and those in whole language settings, over-emphasize decoding. This may be due to the student's present stage in reading as discussed in Chapter 4, or to the stress placed on phonics in a basal approach and by parents as suggested by the New Zealand teachers (N. Allwood, personal communication, April 12, 1991; B. Upkar, personal communication, April 12, 1991).

3. There are few significant sex differences in students' concepts of reading. However, contrary to the research of Johns and Ellis (1976), this study concluded girls gave more vague and irrelevant responses than boys.

4. Many students see reading as a catalyst for future learning. They believe it is necessary to learn new ideas and gave "educational" responses. However it must be noted that many basal reader students viewed reading as solely a school activitiy.

5. Almost all of the whole language students see reading as an integral part of their daily lives through sharing with friends and especially parents whereas basal students viewed reading from a more educational perspective. This was evidenced in Question 2 by the category 2 responses such as; "I read with my parents." or "I read in the playground."

6. All of the students see the how and why purposes of reading but few understand what reading really is; a form of communication between readers and writers.

Recommendations

The following recommendations to parents, teachers and administrators may be made as a result of this study:

Parents

Clearly the parents of the students involved in this study see the importance of reading. They share books with their children on a daily basis and reading materials are always available to these children. Nonetheless, parents themselves need to understand the process of reading as a form of communication.

Many children are coming to school already reading, however they see reading as a sounding out activity. Through the help of teachers and administrators parents may learn to celebrate their child's understanding of a story and the

sharing itself, rather than becoming bogged down with sounding each word out.

Administrators

The willingness to be flexible, share, change, fail, succeed, and grow is the most important recommendation which can be made to any teacher young or old. However, the support of administrators is essential. Only by working together can students be offered the meaningful reading programs they deserve.

With the help of teachers, administrators can create staff development programs that deal with current trends in education and whole language programs. This can be accomplished through networks designed to share ideas within and between districts. Administrators should subscribe to professional publications and circulate current information. Attendence at workshops, and graduate courses, with release time to discuss new-found ideas, should be encouraged.

Teachers

Most importantly, teachers must make students aware of the purpose of reading and help children to define the reading process through meaningful learning. Teachers cannot assume that because their students know how to read, that they are gaining an understanding of the process of reading.

Specifically primary teachers must become researchers within their own classrooms. Little time would need to be spent asking children individually or in small groups "What is reading?" and helping them to determine more meaningful answers.

This could begin by reading kindergarten children a nonsensical story or sentence and asking them what it means. After they decide it does not make sense, the teacher could explain that to read, one must understand what the author is telling. As an example of reading the teacher could then read a story or sentence that is meaningful.

First, second, and third grade teachers could follow this same procedure using nonsense words that the children could sound-out. Teachers could lead the children into concluding that they can sound the word out but to "read" the word they would have to understand what it means. Using this technique and providing children with other whole language, meaningful activities and reading materials, will help children become more aware of what reading really is!

This researcher does advocate a whole language program to help students better understand the meaning of reading, yet it must be noted again, that whole language is not a program but a personal philosophy. Each teacher brings different ideas and experiences to a whole language classroom.

Furthermore whole language cannot be packaged by any publishing corporation. Neat organized packages of teaching materials with a literature-based label is not whole

language. However, drawing on children's experiences and generating developmentally appropriate activities, where meaning is the most significant element of reading, is Whole Language, and will help students gain more meaningful concepts of reading.

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